

Drug Use in Food Animals

Plant owners should maintain communication with producers bringing animals in for slaughter and processing so that any concerns about drug use or withdrawal times can be discussed if needed to ensure animals used for food are safe for consumption.

Producers should be aware that there are only three ways to legally obtain and use antibiotics and other drugs in food animals. The first is over the counter drugs, including feed additive medications, which are labeled for specific uses. These products must be used according to the label for dosage, routes, animal, and disease condition.

The second method is as an “Extra Label Use Drug” where a veterinarian prescribes a use not specified on the drug label. This is allowed only when other drugs are not labeled for the diagnosed condition or where the other drugs are found to be ineffective to treat the condition. The veterinarian must be involved with this process and prepare a specific label for the use of the drug, including a withdrawal time.

The third method is on a prescription basis from your veterinarian. These drugs are approved for use in the class of animal being treated, and the veterinarian gives further directions and instructions on the specific use of the product.

When using any drugs in food producing animals, follow these precautionary management steps to avoid residues.

1. Establish a quality assurance program related to the food animals you produce.
2. Use only FDA approved products.
3. Store and administer all drugs properly.
4. Identify treated animals.
5. Keep adequate records of treatment.
6. Observe label withdrawal times and recognize that a severely ill animal may require an extended withdrawal period.
7. Test for residues if there is any question.
8. Educate employees on drug administration practices and the importance of preventing drug residues.

An excellent reference resource is available to both veterinarians and producers. It is called the Food Animal Residue Avoidance Databank (FARAD). FARAD is a national, USDA-sponsored, cooperative project, with a primary mission to prevent or mitigate illegal residues of drugs, pesticides and other chemicals in foods of animal origin. Submit a question or receive advice by visiting www.farad.org or by calling at 1-888-USFARAD (1-888-873-2723).